The flags of Porco Rosso

The relation between a anti-fascist pig and flying pieces of cloth

Juan Artero

Introduction

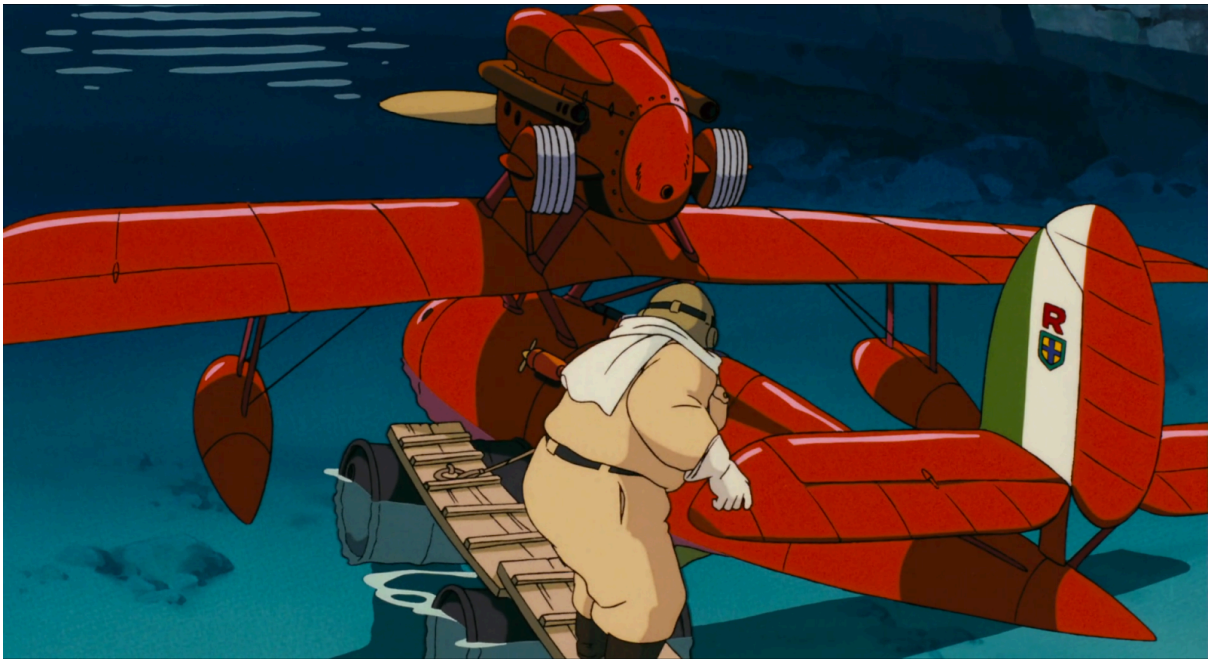
'Porco Rosso' is a Japanese animated film that originally hit theatres in Japan in 1992 and reached the rest of the world in the following two decades; the film was directed by the well-known Japanese director Hayao Miyazaki and produced by the legendary Japanese animation studio Studio Ghibli. Porco Rosso is a film about which a thousand essays could be made and there would still be questions to be answered, be it its story, animation, characters, message and symbolism, etc., this film gives a lot to write about, to put it simply. In this essay I intend to open a small window to clarify one of the thousands of facets of this film: its flags.

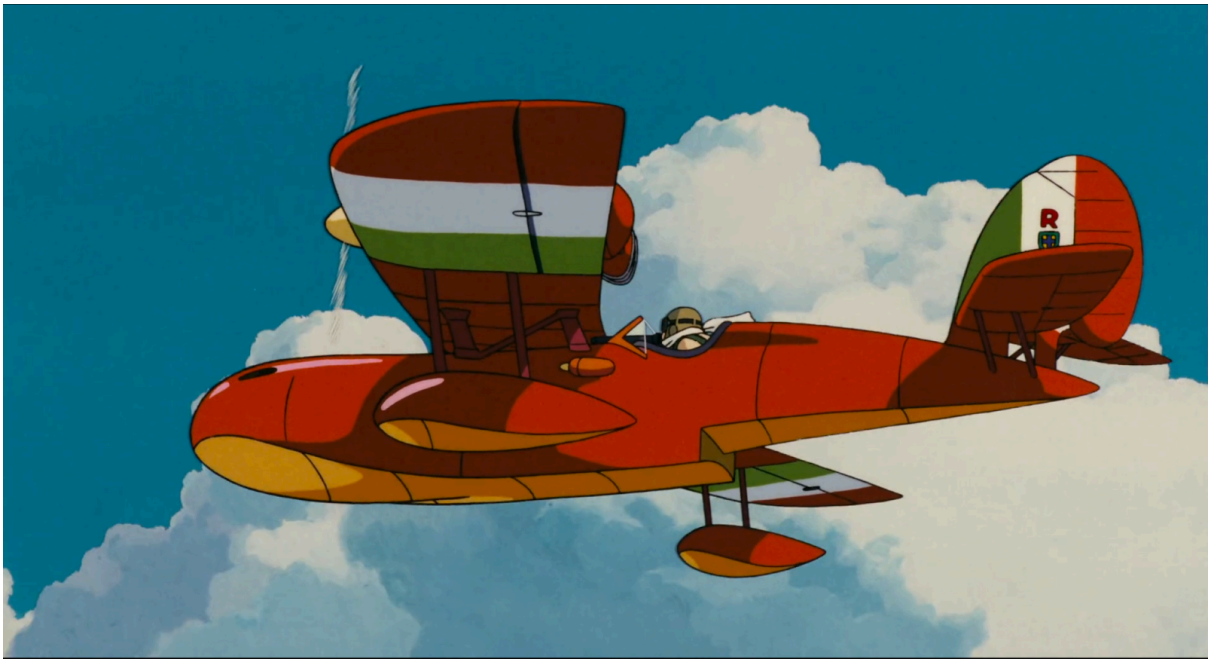
To a normal viewer, the flags we see throughout Porco Rosso may simply be background decoration, something we see on top of buildings or boats or held by people without much consequence. They are persistent, and some of their colours are recognizable, but they don't stand out too much. Someone with more experience in the field of vexillology, or who knows the flags of the world very well can have a great time guessing all the flags in a scene, or scratching their heads to guess what the hell that is supposed to be.

In this short essay I intend to catalogue all the flags (real and imaginary) that can be seen. I'll also try to explain the relevance of that flag in the context of the scene it's in, and in case it's not a flag I recognize or even real, make an educated guess as to what that flag's purpose is and why they'll decide. the animators put it there. This will be done in chronological order, as these flags appear on the screen from the beginning of the film.

Let us begin.

Body of the text





The first flag in the movie appears when we are just over a minute into the film, painted on the tail wing of the character's seaplane. It is clearly the civil flag of the Kingdom of Italy (1861-1946), a tricolour of green, white and red with the coat of arms of the House of Savoy, without a crown. However, this flag has a couple of key differences. First, the coat of arms of the house of Savoy is not the coat of arms of the house of Savoy, but a completely different coat of arms consisting of a blue cross on a yellow background and a green border. As far as I know, such a shield has never been used on an Italian flag; most likely it is an error on the part of the animators. Another curious feature of this flag is the presence of a large red capital 'R' on top of what is supposed to be the coat of arms of the house of Savoy, where the crown would usually be, I think this is an abbreviation or sign of the 'Regia Marina', the navy of the Kingdom of Italy, which fits with when the film takes place (in the

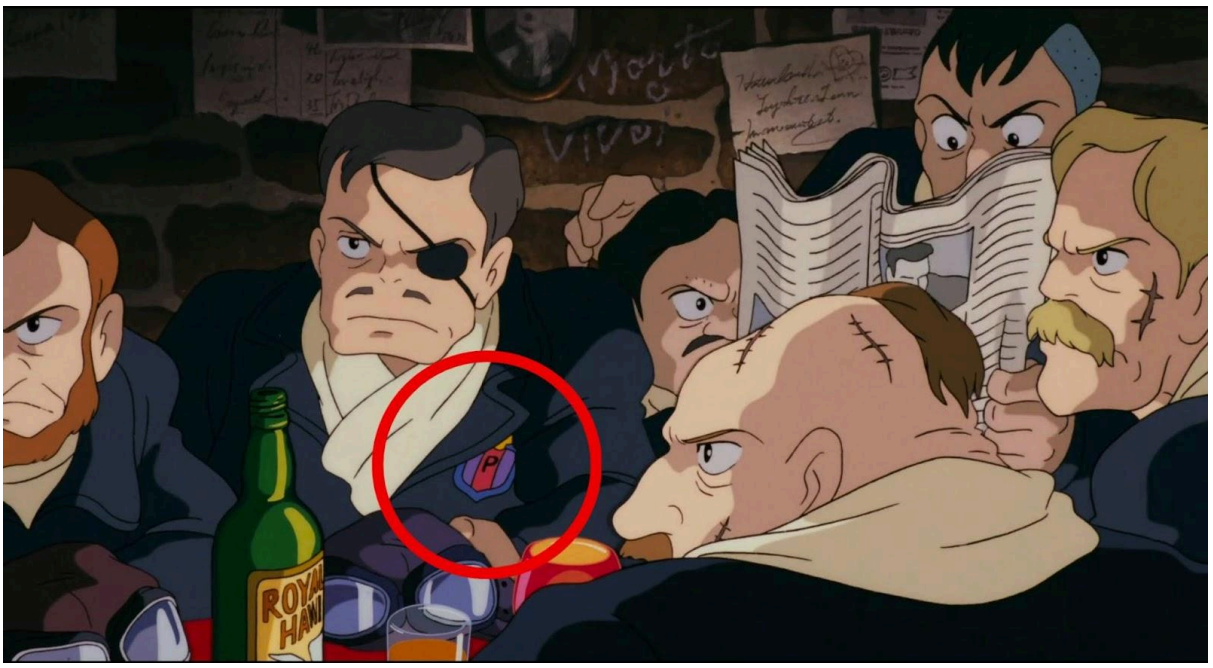
years following the rise to power of Fascism in Italy after the First World War, when the Regia Marina still existed), and may also be related to the fact that the character, owner of the seaplane, is a war veteran, most likely serving under the Regia Marina during the first world war.

This flag and variations of it can be seen in a great multitude of occasions throughout the film, therefore, I will not explain what I have already described when it appears again, although some of the similar flags similar to this one have some minor changes such as the 'R' not appearing, or the colours of the House of Savoy being correct, since it is still understood that it is the civil flag of the Kingdom of Italy.

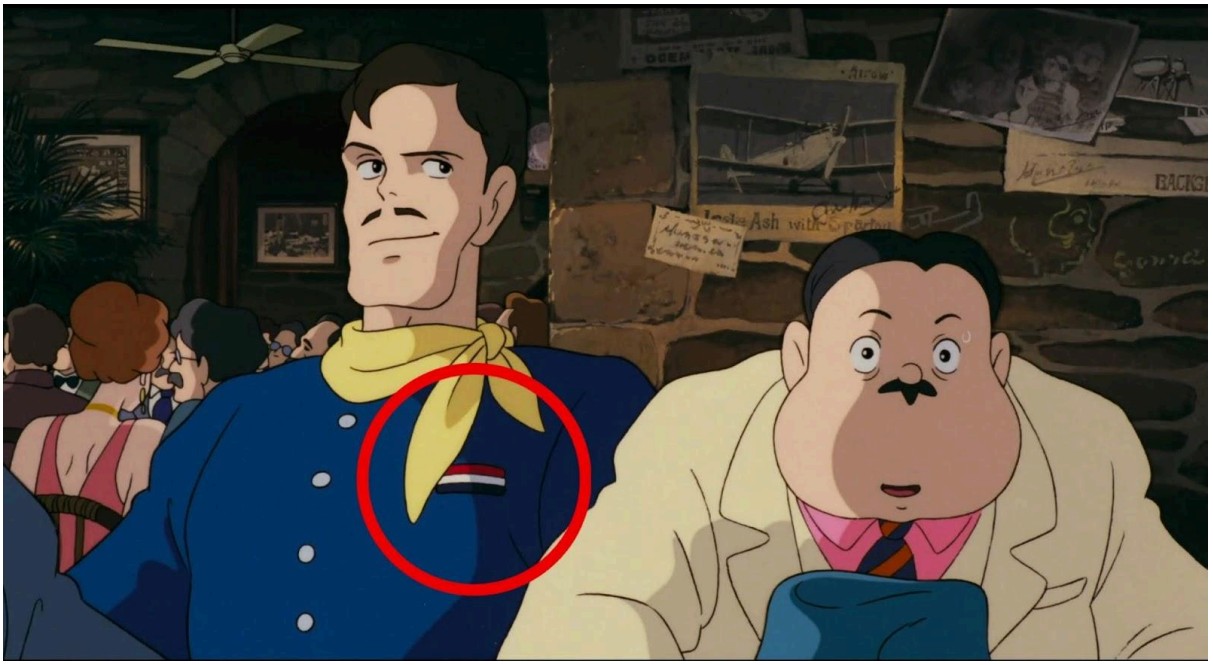
Note that the protagonist's seaplane also carries the current flag of Italy (without coat of arms) under its wings. Although the omission of any shield is surely not to overcomplicate the design of the plane.

Very briefly in this scene we see something similar to a flag painted on the tail end of a parked seaplane, this seaplane belonging to one of the multiple bands of air pirates in the region, in later parts of the film they can be seen up close some of them, and it becomes very clear that all the symbolism around the pirates in this movie is almost cartoonish. For example, this flag is made up of a light blue background with a green cross and what appear to be three skulls in the centre, clearly imitating the flags used by pirates in the 17th and 18th centuries in the Caribbean and North Atlantic, making frequent use of skulls and bones.

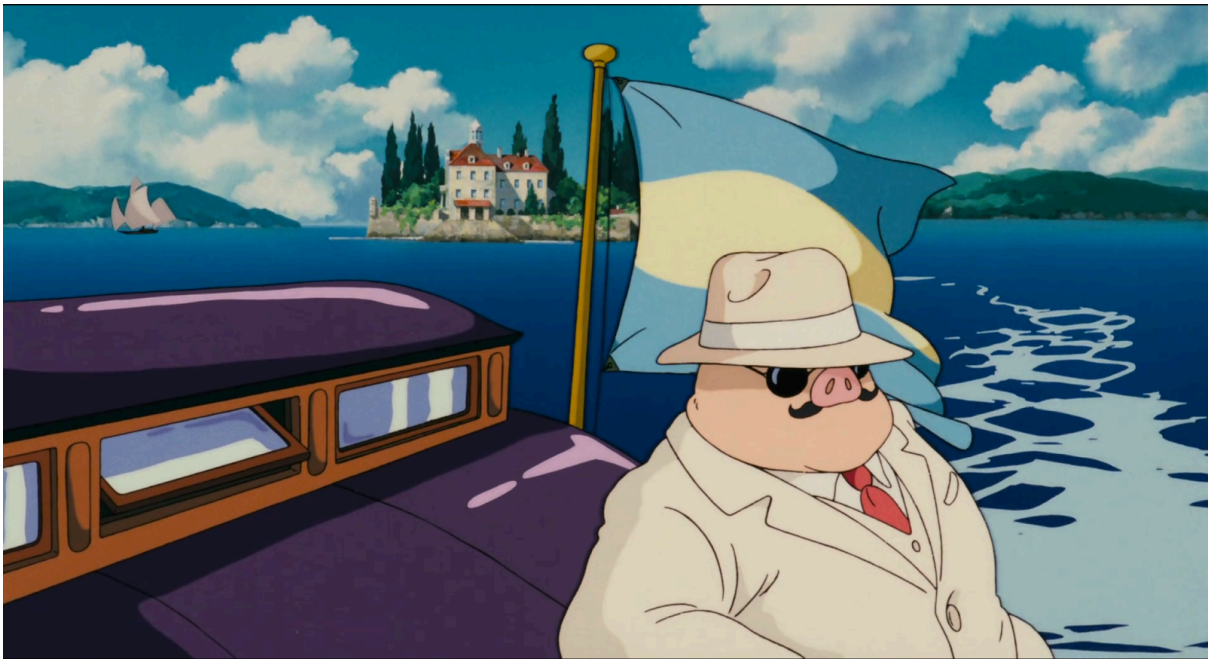
As it can be seen, I have highlighted the flag in question in a red circle, and will continue to do so when it is difficult to distinguish them in the scene.



In this scene we can see a group of pirates discussing the feats of Porco Rosso, while they consider hiring a mercenary to bring Porco down, we can see a coat of arms on the jacket of one of the pirates, which itself contains what we could consider a flag - a horizontal triband of purple, red, and purple with a capital black 'P' in the centre red band and some accessory (most likely a golden skull) on top. This patch sewn on the jacket is almost completely indecipherable, but I think that the 'P' is most likely an abbreviation for 'Pirata' - The Italian word for 'Pirate' (the movie takes place in Italy, remember), therefore, the triband in with the 'P' could be the flag of the group of pirates to which this character in question it belongs.

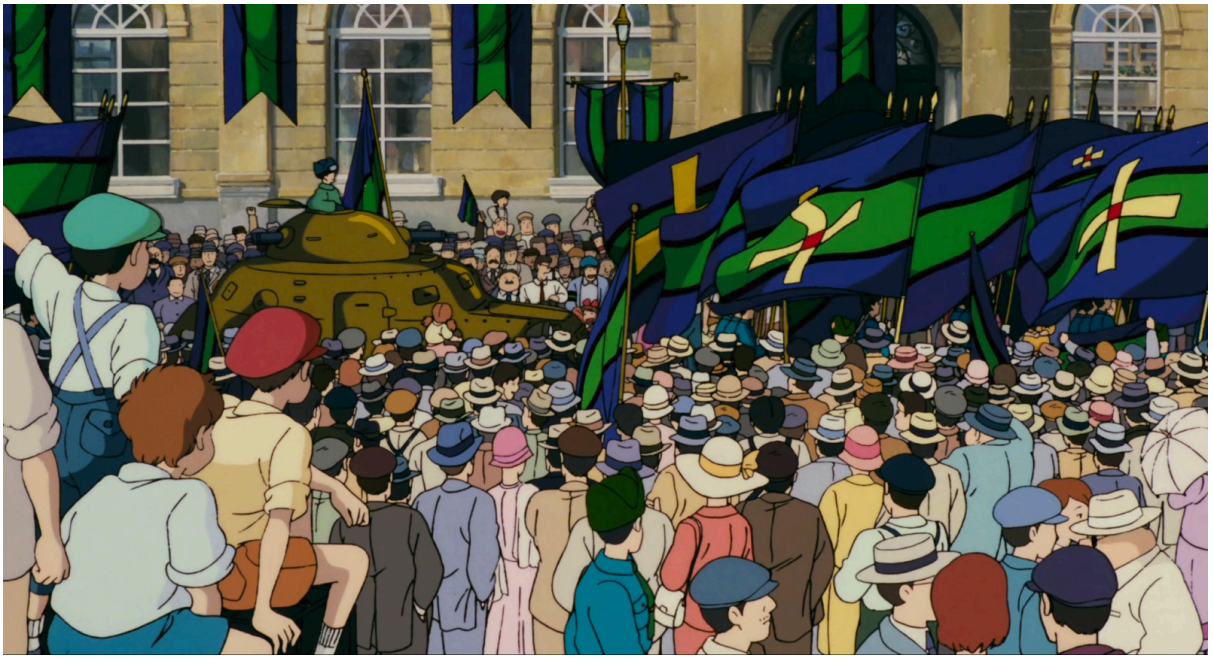


This is the mercenary in question that I mentioned earlier. An important part of the character is that he is American. So he may find it a bit strange that he wears a horizontal stripe of red, white, and dark blue on his shirt. First of all I consider that the last strip of that triband is very dark blue and not black, which is important for the following. It is quite possible that this band is trying to highlight the fact that he is American. In America it is common to say that the colours of the American flag are 'Red, white and blue' , an expression and word order that has become synonymous with the American flag. There are many flags with the colours red, white and blue, but **the red, white and blue** is the American flag. I don't think it's entirely unlikely that the cartoonists had this in mind when drawing that flag on the character's shirt.



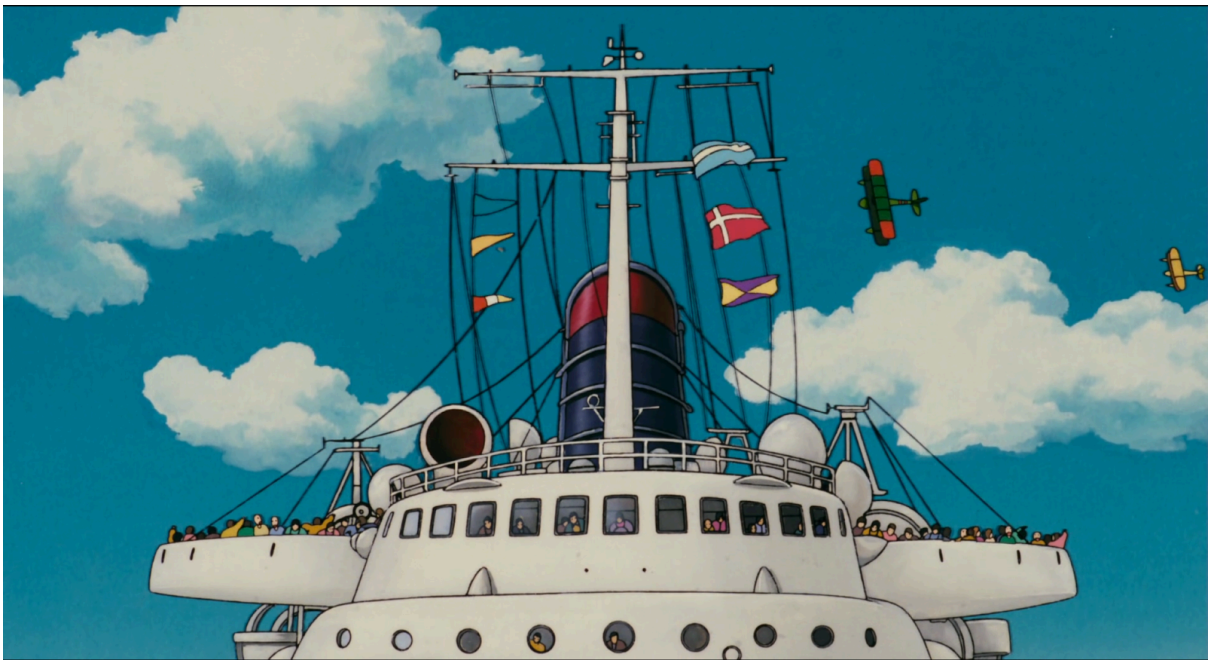
In this scene we see how Porco is taken ashore by a yacht or small boat from the island that we see in the background, while a horizontal triband of blue (light blue), yellow and blue again waves behind him. From the position of the ship and Porco in the shot, we can assume that the flag we see is flying from the stern of the ship. This flag could be representative of a thousand things at once, but I would start with it not being the national flag, as we've looked at the national flag of Italy before and it's pretty clear that it takes place there. Therefore, most likely this flag is either a regional one, the house flag of some shipping company or the flag of a yacht club, although I don't think the latter is very possible since the flag is rectangular and not triangular as most yacht club flags.

Interestingly, in an earlier scene we can see that same blue-on-yellow-on-blue pattern drawn on a plane's tail wing, it's quite possible there's a connection between the two. Most likely the blue, yellow, blue flag is the flag of the island where the 'Hotel Adriano' is located, that is, the flag of the company that manages the hotel, seeing how it is only used by the boat that goes from the island to land and it is seen painted on a tail wing inside the hotel as I wrote before.



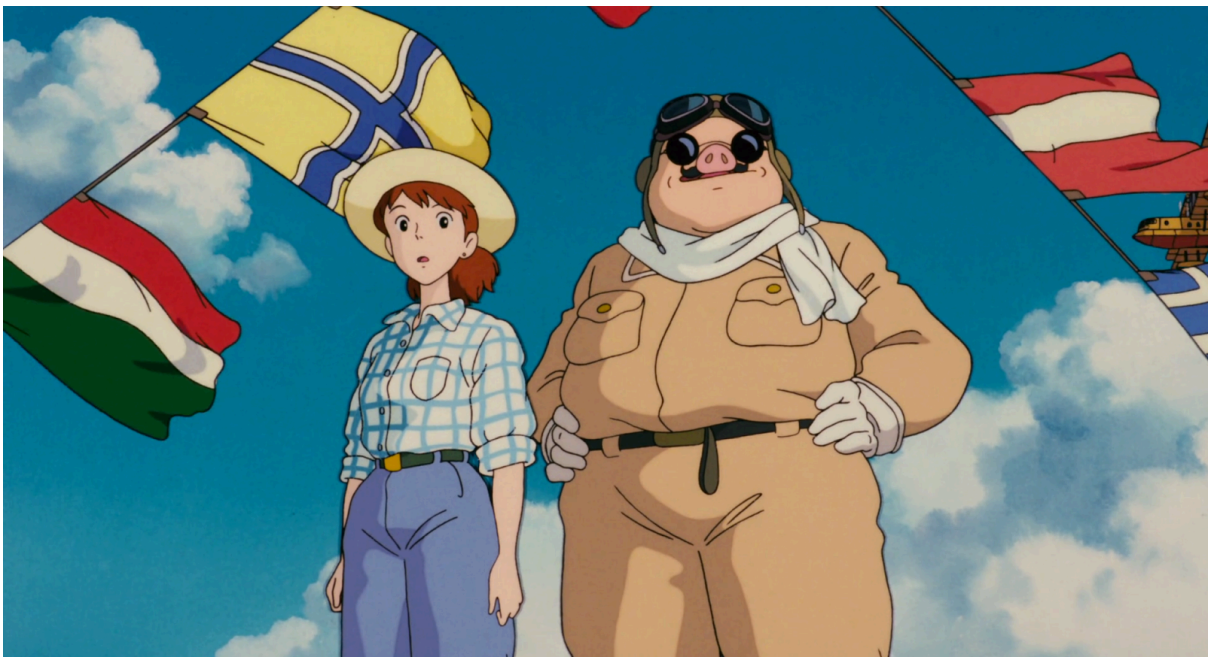
There is much to talk about in this series of images. The flag we see the most in this sequence of the film is a triband of dark blue, dark green, and dark blue again. This pattern can be seen on the flag flown by the young man in the first photograph, as well as on the armbands worn by many people in the sequence, reminiscent of the armband worn by members of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (The Nazi Party), curiously, in all the following scenes the flag described above now appears with the middle green stripe fimbriated in black; which may be a simple mistake by the drawers or simply highlighting that both are official. In the last photograph is where we can see more variants of the previous design, some have a yellow cross with a red square in the centre that extends throughout the flag, others have the same cross with a red square only in the upper blue strip and finally another variant with a large orange cross without a red square can be distinguished very briefly. In the background are swallow-tailed flags hanging from a building and others tied around a lamppost. It is clear, and reinforced by the military march atmosphere throughout

the sequence, that this flag is the flag of the National Fascist Party within the world of the film; I maintain that what we see is not the national flag, but rather that of some organisation, most certainly that of the party in power. The multiple variants of the flag with crosses, I believe, may represent the army, or some type of Christian community.



In this scene we can clearly see what appear to be signalling flags flying from atop a cruise ship. It's easy to see that the flag of Denmark makes a mysterious appearance, and that the one above it, if only it had a yellow circle, could be that of Argentina, beneath the Danish flag we have another strange flag that to compare it to something looks somewhat similar in design to the flag of Grenada, the Caribbean country, being divided into four triangles that converge in the centre from the sides, the top and bottom triangles being purple and those on the sides yellow. Looking at the signal flag code, none of the flags in this shot match the actual signal flags, but the ones on the left are a bit close.

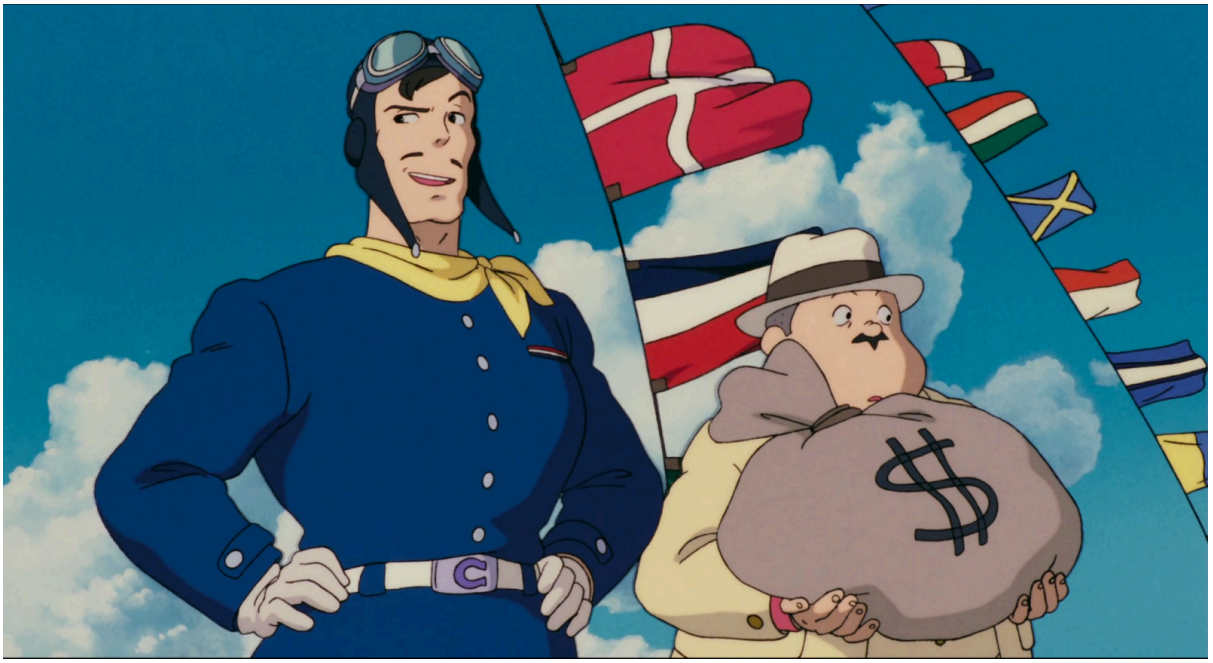
This frame is from a scene where the squadron of planes the character belonged to is in a dogfight against another squadron of enemy planes. Due to the iron crosses painted on the wings, the easiest conclusion to reach would be to assume that they are of German origin, however we must remember that this combat takes place in the Adriatic Sea, and although it is true that there were units of the German Empire present on the Italian front during the first world war, it is most likely that they are aircraft of Austro-Hungarian origin, since in addition to the iron cross, the biplanes have the Austrian flag (three horizontal red, white and red stripes) painted on the wings.



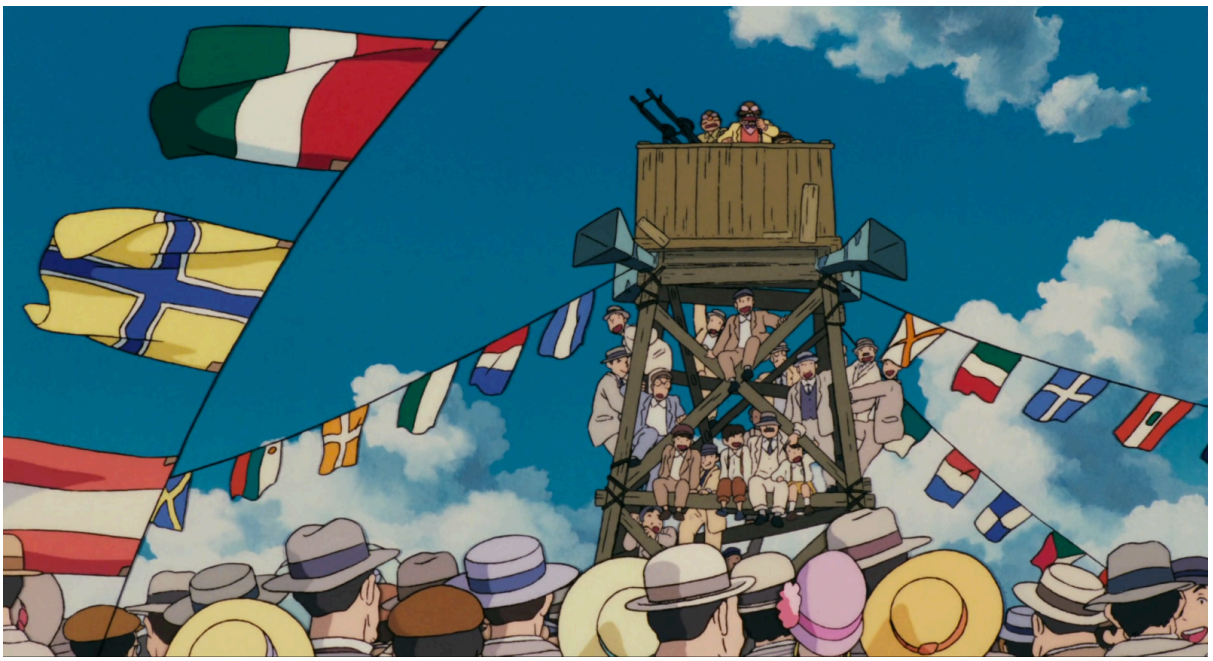
The next series of images is going to be the largest in this essay. They all belong to a sequence in which the character and his antagonist carry out a dogfight around an island full

of spectators. This island is full of flags of all shapes and colors. Some of these are clearly from real world countries, other flags are as far as I understand fictitious or possibly belonging to subnational entities. Having clarified this, the comments in the following images will be quite scarce, limited to pointing out the recognizable (or unrecognisable) flags in the images and perhaps even curiosities about them. Also, I will not comment on those flags that are 'repeated' from other scenes.

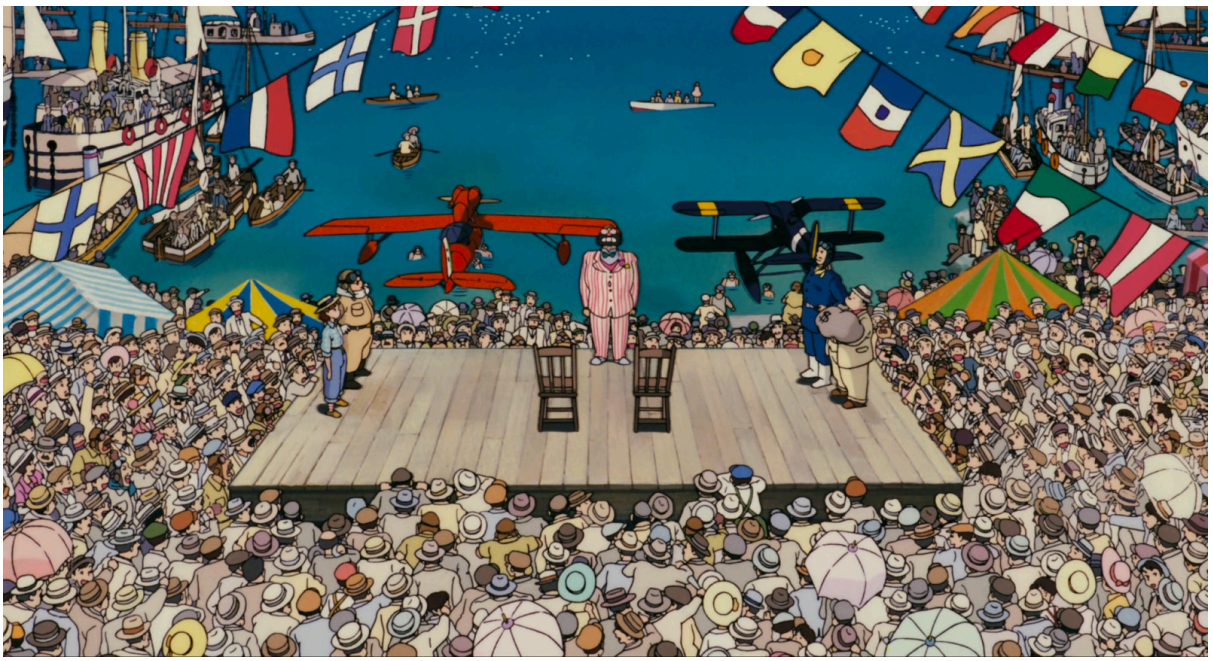
In this picture we can clearly recognize two flags of our current world, the flag of Hungary and that of Austria. Below the flag of Austria we see a flag with a blue background and a white cross, most likely this is one of the many Greek flags that follow this design, either the current naval flag or former national flag. The strangest flag present in this scene is the one we see waving above the Hungarian flag, a yellow flag with a blue cross fimbriated in white that I honestly don't know what it refers to.



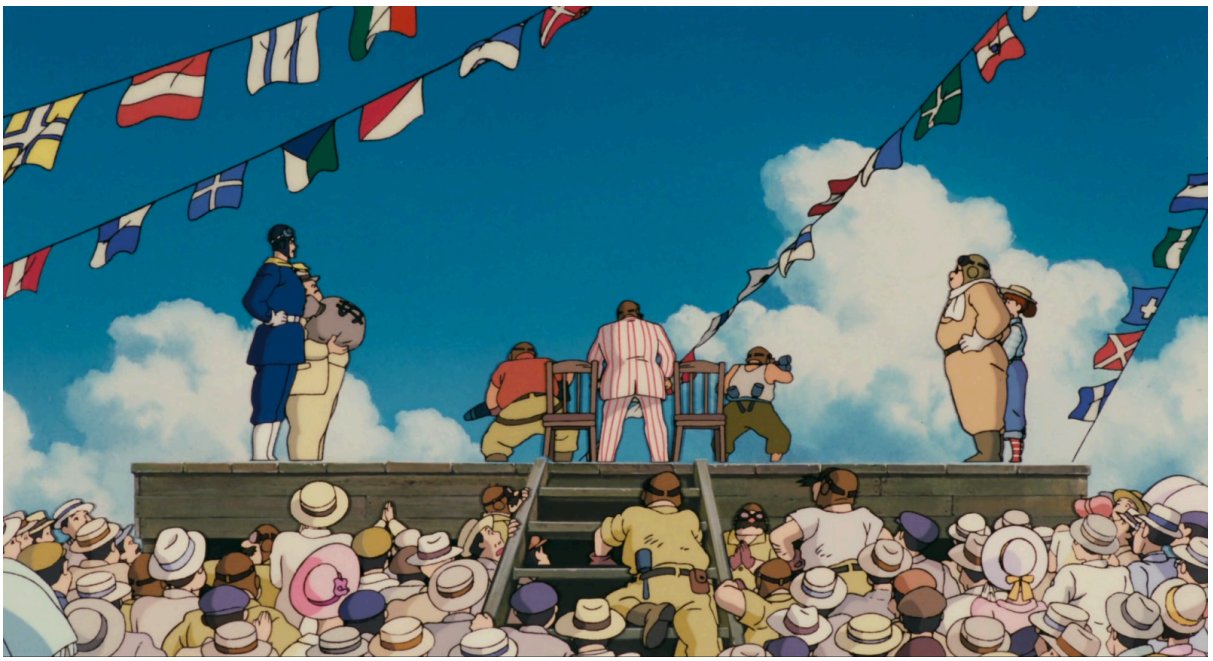
Again, let's start with the most recognizable flags, in the foreground we have what could be the flag of Denmark, if the cross was closer to the hoist, or that of the Order of the Knights of Malta, or one of the many flags with a very similar design if the cross were centred. Just below it appears to be the flag of the German Empire, or it could also be the flag of Upper Volta. Behind there is the flag of France but with the blue and red switched places, a design that existed and was in use at the end of the 18th century. A little further down there is a flag with a blue background and a yellow saltire, which could correspond to the flag of Mercia, just below is the flag of Indonesia, followed by an unknown triband of blue, white and blue with the fimbriated white stripe in black.



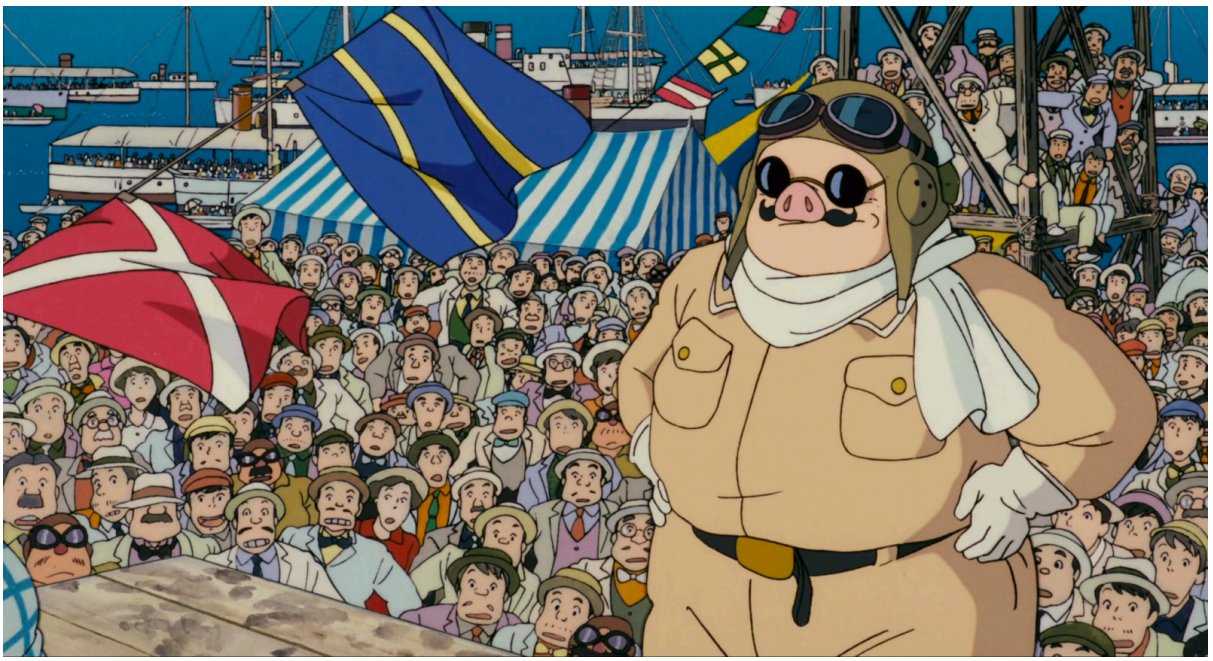
In the foreground you can easily see the flag of Italy, behind a little below we also recognize the flag of Bulgaria, with a curious yellow and red symbol that is very probably the same symbol that Bulgaria had on its flag during its period as a Soviet satellite during the Cold War, and judging by the vivid red and yellow, it's probably the 1947 version. To the right of that is a yellow flag with a white Nordic cross, which for lack of any leads as to what it represents, it is somewhat close to the flag of Dorset, in England, and next to it we see a green and white flag, with white on top, which matches the flag of the German länder of Saxony, but it could perfectly belong to any other region or town in central Europe because that pattern horizontal bicolor is very common in the area. On the other side of the tower there is a white flag with a yellow-close-to-orange saltire, which I believe is intended to be the flag of the Spanish Empire with the Cross of Burgundy, but with the wrong colour although not very far off, although, if we take the colours as the correct one, the flag does resemble the naval flag of Belgium, but I have to admit this is a bit of a stretch. A little further on we can see the one that seems to be the flag of Austria with a strange symbol, which could perfectly be the flag of French Polynesia, since the flag was adopted in 1984. Below this we have the last two flags of this image, which I have not been able to decipher, one is a chequered flag of four squares, two blue and two white, and a flag of the same design as the Czech flag, but with the originally blue triangle coloured green.



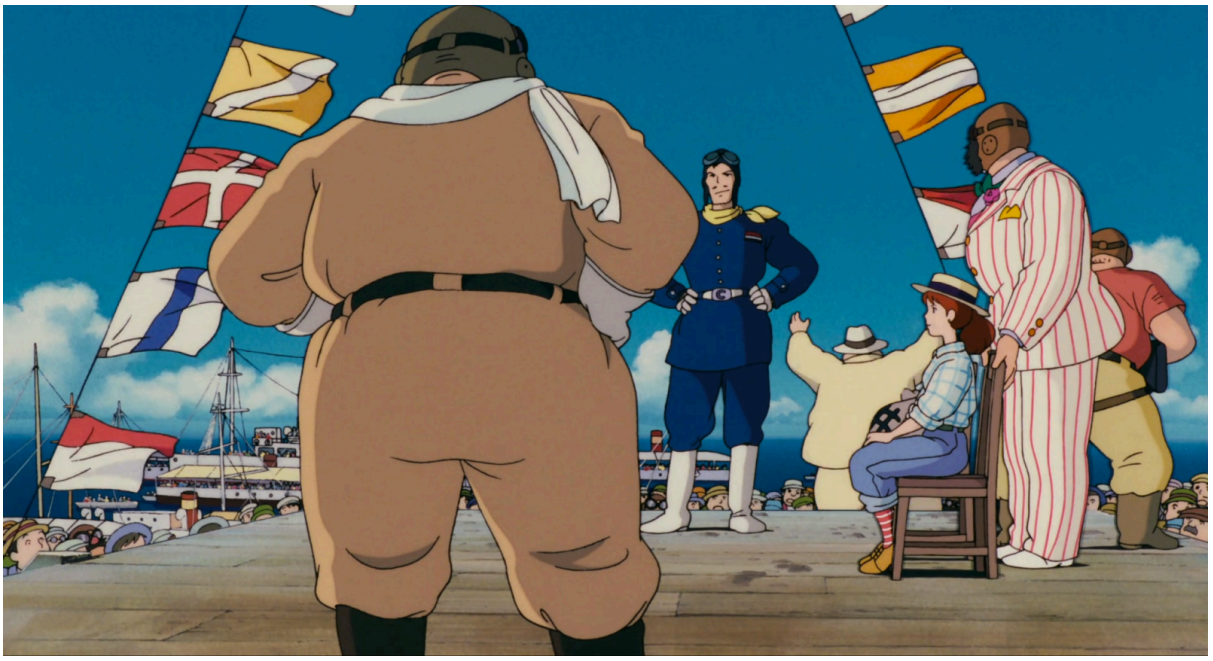
If we look from left to right, the first flag of all consists of a white background with a centred blue cross, this could be either an attempt at the Finnish flag, or one of the many Greek flags with a similar design; considering that there is an extremely similar flag a bit further on, I wouldn't rule out that both cases are true at the same time. Immediately next to it is a very interesting flag, 8 alternating red and white horizontal stripes, which is strikingly similar to the banner of the Majapahit Empire, a state that controlled a significant part of present-day Indonesia from the 13th to 16th centuries. Next we look to the right to see a strange flag formed by a yellow background with a geometric shape similar to an orange shield, which I have no clue what could mean, the following flag is very surprising, because I think it is about the flag of New York city; the flag is a vertical tricolour with the colours blue, white and orange, with a symbol similar to a dark blue shield in the middle, the veracity of the flag in the film is surprising, even the colour of the shield in the centre coincides with that of the current flag of New York city. The following flag can be a little hard to make out: just above the New York flag one can see the orange and yellow colours next to a ship's mast, it can be hard to tell as the ship's sail makes it look like it's part of the flag, but I consider that it is in fact the flag of Prague, next we find a red and white flag, and not to repeat that it is the flag of Indonesia, I think it is probably that of Poland, right next to the polish flag we can see a curious flag split vertically in two colours: yellow and green, which I have not been able to find its origin, finally, a flag split vertically in red and white with a symbol in the upper right corner, it is clearly Malta.



This image can be a bit overwhelming, and the exact frame is not the best to recognize some of the flags, but the important thing is that there are many flags that we already know, so the actual number of flags to mention is less than it may seem. First of all we have a mainly white flag with two much smaller blue stripes near the centre, which I have not been able to make sense of. Immediately below we find another curious variation of the Czech flag, this time with the upper red half changed to a green colour, to the right of this we find a diagonal flag of the colours white and red, which I would not rule out that it is simply a utilitarian flag used to communicate through the semaphore system. On a completely different rope, further to the right, we still find a flag with a green background with a superimposed white cross, this flag could be one of multiple local flags with a similar design, but the ones that come closest to it that my research has turned out are either the flag of the island of Barra, in the United Kingdom, or that of Devon, in the same country, but it is impossible that this was the idea when they were placed there. In the lower left corner of the image we see a flag that should remind us of the Swiss flag: a white Greek cross inside a cloth of a single colour, only in this case it is blue and not red, but blue, of unknown origin. Above this, in turn, we see a green, white and green vertical triband, which despite being upside down (or not) surprisingly resembles the Andalusian flag.

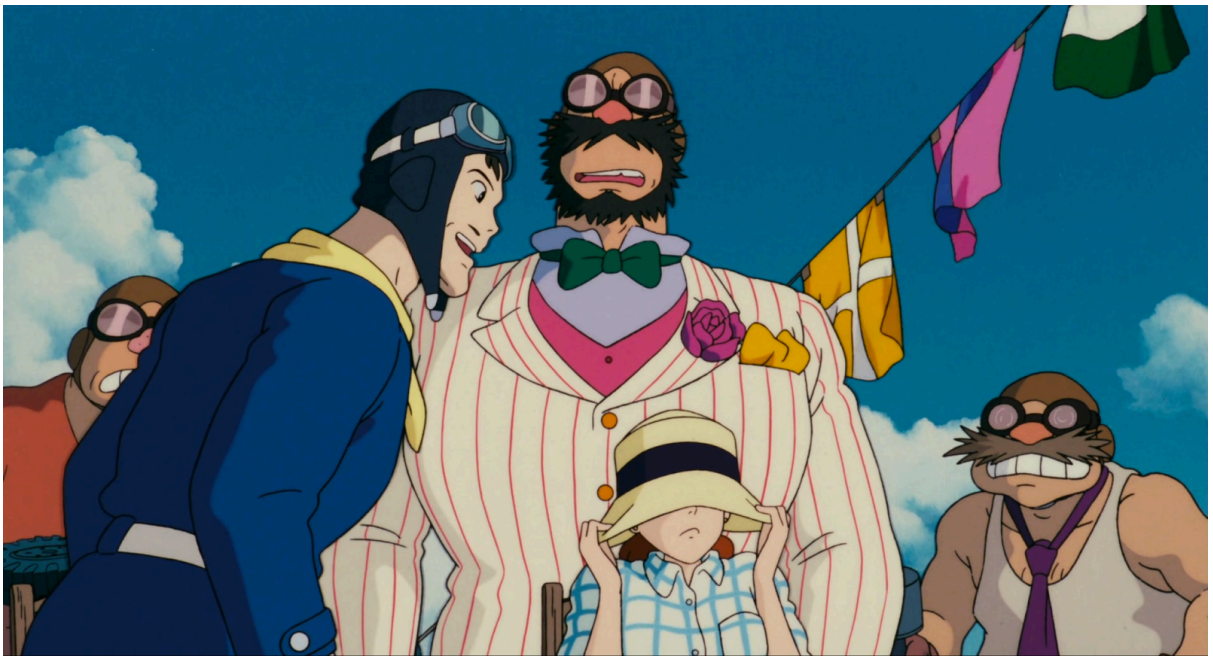


Similar to one of the flags in the previous image, the first interesting flag in this one is a blue background with two very small yellow stripes, which in the same way I don't know what place or organisation it can be for. In the background of the image, between the Austrian and Italian flags, we can see a flag with a yellow background and a green centred cross, the only one I can associate it with is the unofficial flag of Gotland, Sweden.

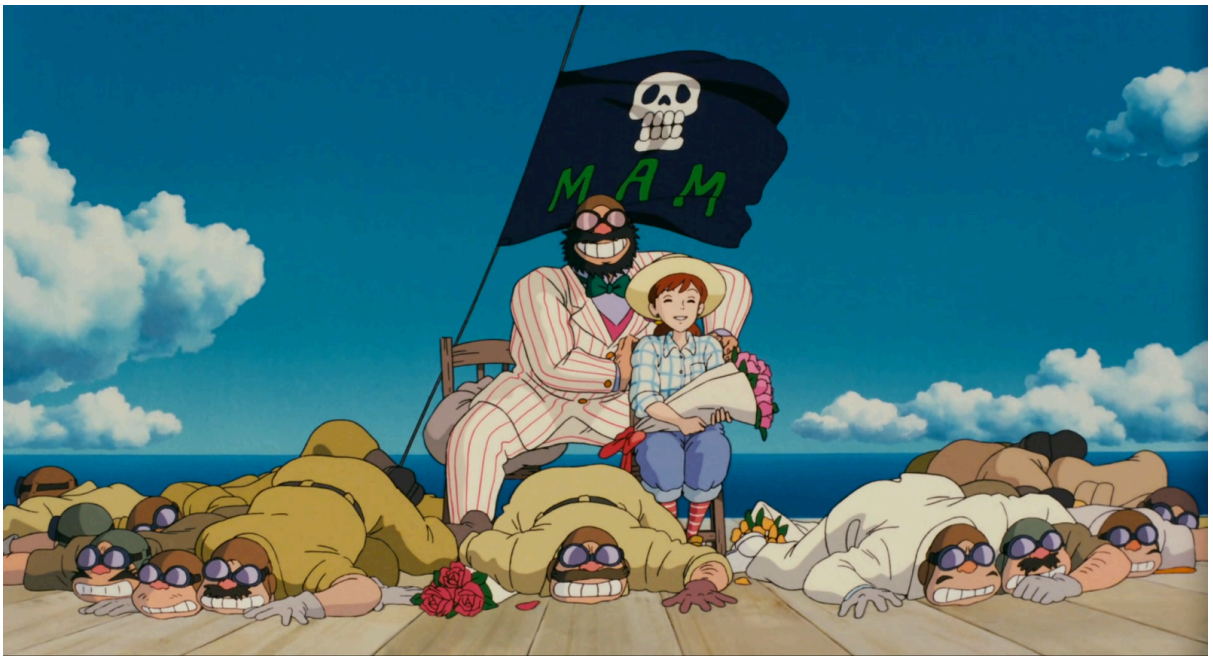


The first flag of interest in this image is on the far right, being three vertical stripes of white, blue and white again, today we could see it as a vertical version of the anti-putin and anti-war flag of Russia, but we must remember that this movie came out in 1991 and it is most likely just a prop to fill in the ropes. Ignoring the flag of Denmark/Knights of Malta we find a yellow flag with a white diagonal stripe, opposite to this is a flag with 4 orange, white, white, and orange stripes; if we pay attention we can see that there is a very subtle black line

that separates the central white stripe in two; I have not been able to locate the origin or meaning of either of these last two flags.



The only noteworthy flag in this image is a colourful flag made up of three horizontal stripes of the colours pink, purple (close to dark blue), and pink, truly cryptic.

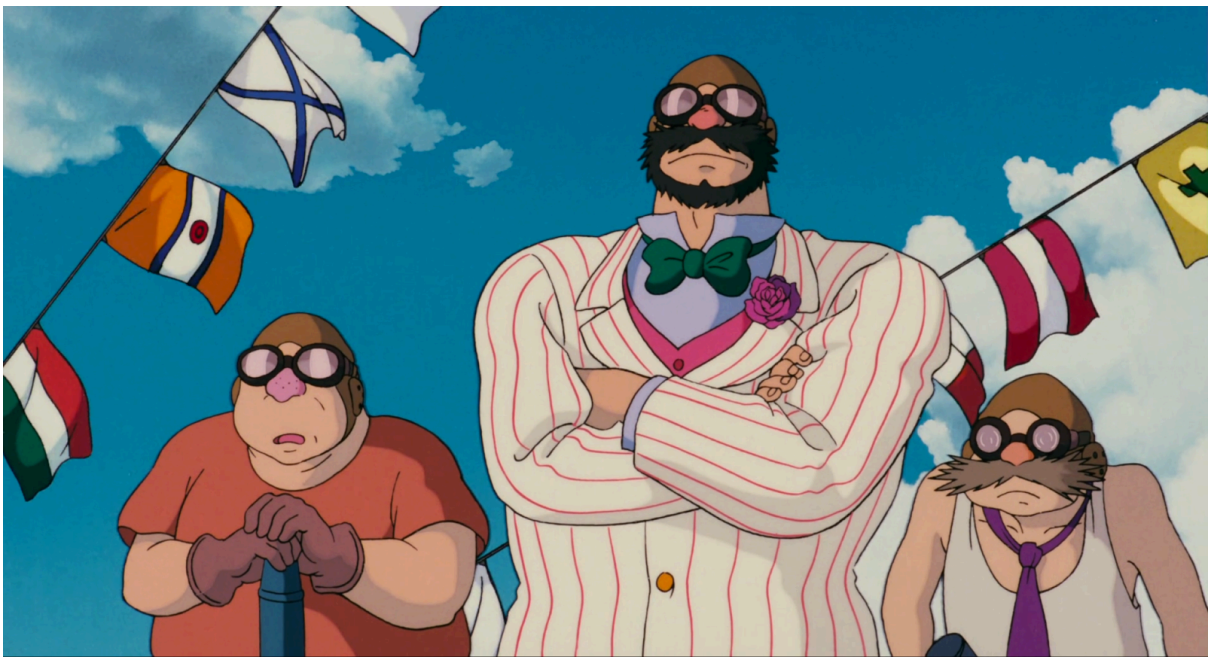


Warning to those interested in seeing the film and who have not done so halfway through this essay, perhaps they would prefer to skip this flag, I am going to give a very small spoiler warning.

In the film it is said on several occasions that the main antagonistic pirate crew is called the 'Mamma aiuto', which means 'Mama help!' in Italian, and its distinctive symbol is that of the skull, and that the characteristic of the crew it's their aviator hats and pinkish

noses; taking all this into account, it is clear that the black flag with a skull and the inscription 'MAM' in green is the flag of the Mamma aiuto.

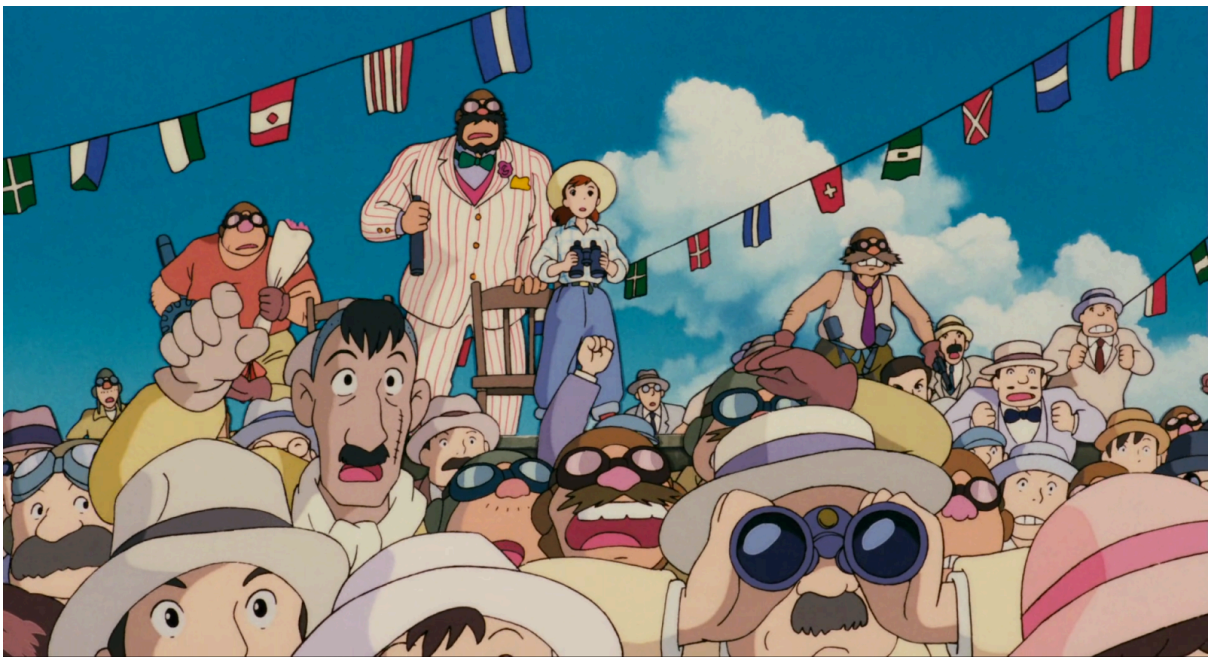
The flags are not as prominent or easy to see in this scene as they are in the others, so we'll have to focus on the upper right corner of this shot. The first thing that catches our eye is another of the strange flags with a monochrome background with two small stripes near the centre, this time the background colour being white and the small stripes red. To the right of this we find a very interesting and in my opinion very beautiful flag; it is made up of a white saltire in the centre, with the upper and lower triangles yellow and those on the sides blue. Having extensively researched the Canarian flags, I recognize this as very similar to the flag designed and proposed by the group of the 'República Independiente del Atlántico' around the 1950s for the Canary Islands, likewise, a thousand and one flags proposed around the world could be very similar to this one.



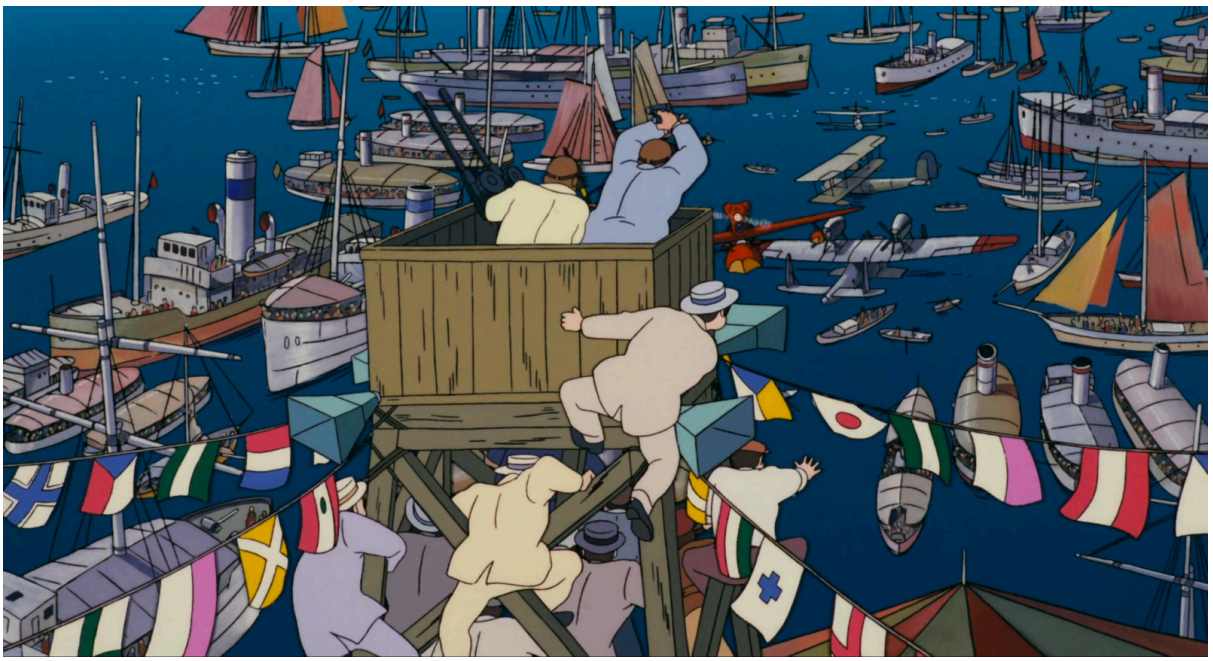
The first interesting flag in this image is a vertical triband of the colours orange, white and orange again, with the middle white stripe fimbriated with blue; In that same strip there is a symbol that I believe is something similar to a rose. Just above it we surprisingly find a flag of our own world again: the Russian naval ensign; a white background with a blue saltire in the centre, I believe that as with the New York flag, this is a deliberate decision by the animators. On the opposite side of the image we find a flag that follows a pattern that we have already seen on several occasions, we will find flags that all have the same elements, but with the colours changed, as has been the case with other flags that have the same design as the Swiss flag; in this case it is a yellow background with a green cross in the centre.

In the context of the movie. this flag is used to signal the beginning of the dogfight between the main character and the main antagonist, since we have covered the Mamma

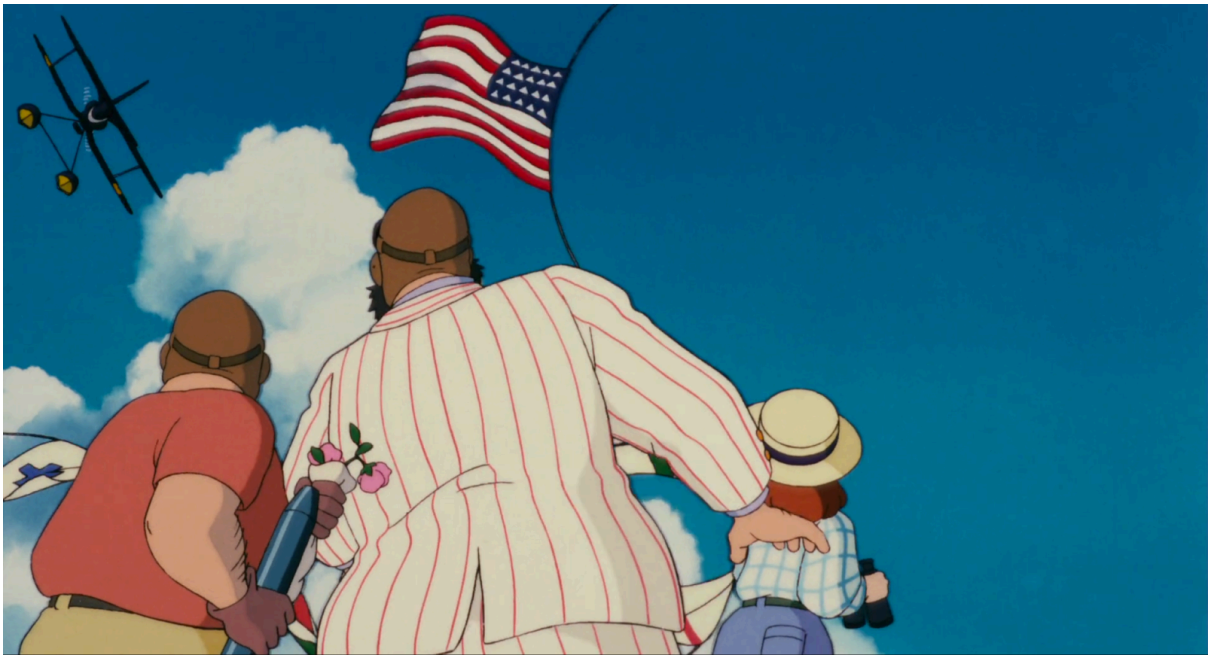
aiuto flag before the only possibility left in my opinion is that this is the global flag of the Pirates Guild, the criminal syndicate in which all seaplane pirate crews take part. A simple golden skull on a black background, is it possible to be more of a pirate?



Although there are so many flags in this image, we are only interested in very few, because as I said at the beginning of this part, I will not repeat comments or explanations when some flags appear again in several images. Thus, the first curious flag is a vertical triband of red, white and red again, which I believe is meant to be the Canadian flag, due to the symbol that the flag has in the centre; we should already know that when the animators of the film want to convey a symbol on a flag, they do so only with either a circle or a shape similar to a shield, so I think it is perfectly plausible that this is the Canadian flag. Also in the approximate centre of the line on the right of the image we find our second flag of interest: the Swiss; the classic red background with a Greek cross in its centre, what more could you ask for?



Again, as crowded as this scene is, we are only interested in a very small number of flags: the first of all is on the far left of the image, it is a white background with a blue cross in the centre stretched out to the sides and fimbriated in white again, creating a black border near the blue cross, it’s origin is unknown to me. Next to this we have the Czech flag, no colour changes (although another one is coming up), a simple flag split in half horizontally with the upper part white and the lower part red with a blue triangle attached to the side of the pole. Beneath this, we find a more than strange flag, a horizontal bicolor of pink and white, that I could not discover what it intends to represent; now, as I anticipated, we find another variant of the Czech flag, this time, the red has been replaced by yellow, in previous images it had already been replaced by green, but I guess that wasn't enough and they had to put it in yellow also. Next to it we have the flag of Japan, the well-known Hinomaru, a flag that many people have described as a vexillologist's dream due to its simplicity, beauty and symbolism; although I don't share that opinion, it is undeniable that it is recognizable beyond belief and it does not surprise anyone that it is present in the film. Below the Hinomaru, in another line we have another variant of the Swiss flag, but this time with a white background and a blue cross, the opposite of another that we had seen before. I want to finish by making a guess regarding the flag just to the right of the previous flag, it's hard to say for sure, but I think there's a very good chance that it's the flag of England; even though half of the flag is lost to the screen cutout, you can still make out where the two lines intersect to form the cross and the colours are very similar to the English ones in intensity.



I will end this essay with what is surely the best-known flag in the world: that of the United States of America, except that in the world of Porco Rosso there were only 11 original colonies, and around the 1920s there were only 20 states! And the stars that are supposed to represent the different states are not stars but triangles, well, that is if the US flag abides by the same rules that it does in our world.

It's always fun when watching a movie to look for the American flag and see if it fits with how it was at the time the movie takes place, and I'm afraid Porco Rosso fails here.

Conclusion

In short, Porco Rosso is a film that takes advantage of the visual medium to subtly communicate worldbuilding and stories of the characters through the flags that surround said characters or the entire world. When they have no intended meaning, the film is able to create imaginative fictional flags while using flags from the real world to grab the reader's attention and fill the screen with colour.

But the reality is that each and every one of the close to 5 thousand words that I have spent calling attention to all these flags is purely speculative. In order to really know the why and how of all these flags, it would be necessary to interview each and every one of the people involved in the film, a project that is far beyond my possibilities, for which I strongly urge the reader to take this work with a healthy amount of salt and don't hesitate to contact me to correct me on a crazy thing i've written or give me any suggestions. To facilitate this I leave my linktree here: https://linktr.ee/gortius_viii.

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